From Recruiting to Decruiting

Keith Moseley

During a difficult time, the Laboratory responded with an innovative career-planning program.

In 1969, the Laboratory experienced the first of what was to be several "reduction in force" projects. It was a shock to most of the technical personnel caught in this episode because they had expected to remain until retirement.

At the time, I was working in the Personnel Department as the recruiting manager. Over the next few years, much of my work turned to "decruiting," with much energy put into helping our laid-off employees relocate elsewhere in the Laboratory or in the outside world. The number of Lab employees facing layoffs was estimated to be 100 to 200 annually for 3 of the next 4 years. However, these numbers were reduced significantly, because many of those who were selected because of cutbacks in their respective projects had broad knowledge and skills and were able to transfer within the Laboratory to other programs. Nevertheless, those who were faced with having to leave the Lab needed guidance and support.

The Laboratory forged ahead and created a unique program, called Career Planning in Industry. This was a new frontier for the Laboratory, because, amazingly, almost no information from outside companies was available to develop adequate support for employees. The program included individual and group awareness meetings, individual counseling for employees who were to be laid off, and career planning workshops to develop knowledge and skills for effective career planning and job relocation.

Nothing like this had ever been provided in the industrial world. A team was formed, consisting of Richard Knowdell, Marlys Hanson, and myself, and we worked under the supervision of Personnel Manager Jack Brewer. We made presentations at national and international conferences, colleges, and other industrial settings. Representatives from many industrial organizations expressed strong interest, so we began to offer seminars at the Laboratory to share our practices. Almost daily, we received inquiries from other company representatives including some CEOs. Many visited the Lab to participate in our seminars.

The counseling program was so effective that many Lab employees recommended that the individual counseling and the workshops be offered to all employees. Thus began an ongoing counseling program, including a Career Center and Employee Assistance Program that still exists. The first ever Career Planning in Industry program would eventually become internationally known.

Giving Change a Chance

Jean Shuler and Steven Ashby

Shuler and Ashby talk about the sudden departure of NERSC and how that resulted in the development of CASC, a leading computer research center at the Lab.

Jean Shuler

I was there at the beginning of NERSC (the National Energy Research Supercomputer Center) in 1974. NERSC's principal objective was to supply high-performance computing and networking services to energy research facilities nationwide. It was an incredible experience to be on the ground floor when it all started. Getting in on the ground floor of any project, at any time, is wonderful.

When I came over, I didn't know what my job was going to be. Never having done data storage before, I jumped into working in storage. We had these little disks—tiny little things that just pale in comparison to the terabytes of data that we store now. Paul Lund was my mentor, and I worked on a little program called Pack Rat, which stored away information. Then I worked on storage with Joe Choy: he and I were the team that put together the FILEM systems, an archival case storage system. We worked long, hard hours, but I think we destroyed more people's files than we saved.

NERSC lasted for 22 years here at the Lab. Then in 1995, DOE announced that NERSC was moving to Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. It was a devastating experience for most of us, because we were a family and had worked together for many years. None of us believed it would ever happen, up until the last minute when they came in and said, "We're moving to Berkeley." Eventually, most people found jobs, but it was pretty awful for awhile.

But at the same time NERSC was leaving, ASCI (Accelerated Strategic Computing Initiative) was just getting started, and it needed people. As NERSC left for Berkeley, Livermore had this influx of extra programmers and system administrators, and with ASCI starting up, there was a home for them and lots to do. If that hadn't happened, we would have been scrounging for people. As it was, ASCI ended up with the cream of the crop. In retrospect, it was probably the best thing that ever happened to Livermore's ASCI program.

The NERSC family.

Steven Ashby

On November 1, 1995, I had just returned from visiting another lab, when senior management informed us that NERSC was being moved to Lawrence Berkeley. I was a member of the Center for Computational Sciences and Engineering (CCSE), a research arm that was affiliated with NERSC, so this affected us, too. There were a lot of shocked people in the room; none of us quite knew what it meant at the time.

Several of us met to discuss options. In particular, Mike McCoy and I spent a lot of time discussing what had happened and what we should do. (Mike was the deputy for NERSC. He eventually decided to stay at Livermore and became the department head for Livermore Computing.) We concluded that the Lab needed a home for computer science and mathematics research (since CCSE was moving to Berkeley with NERSC), but that any such research center needed strong ties to Livermore programs. We pitched our idea to key people around the Laboratory, especially in the programs, and we were encouraged by the response. In particular, we received key support from Bruce Tarter, Mike Anastasio, Dave Cooper, Dave Nowak, and Randy Christensen. These conversations led to the formation of the Center for Applied Scientific Computing (CASC) in March 1996.

Today, CASC is recognized as a leading research center; it also is one of the largest at nearly 100 people. I am often asked, "Did you expect it to be this big?" The answer is no. It's much larger and more successful than any of us ever thought possible. I remember early on telling Dave Cooper, "Well, Dave, we'll be starting with 12 research scientists, and I think we'll grow to 15, maybe 20." So much for my early projections!

Much of our rapid growth can be attributed to the concurrent growth in the Lab's ASCI program. ASCI needed specialized expertise in numerical algorithms and high-performance computing, and it generously supported CASC from the very beginning. We recruited constantly during the early years—and gained weight as a result of the endless interview lunches and dinners. It took a lot of the staff's time to do this, but people realized it was worth the effort to ensure quality. Now, when people walk the halls, they know that they helped to make this an exceptional organization. They also know that they are making real contributions to ASCI and other Laboratory programs. And this has been the key to our success.